

Greimas, Bremond, and the 'Miller's Tale.' - A.J. Greimas; Claude Bremond

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In the late twentieth century, the application of modern and contemporary critical approaches to literature has become widespread especially in regard to modern literature. David Lodge, for example, has used Roman Jakobson's distinction between metaphor and metonymy and the Formalists' concept of defamiliarization to explain the relations between modernism, antimodernism, and postmodernism (3-16, 74). The *James Joyce Quarterly* has devoted part of a number to the results and critique of a graduate-class exercise on the Seymour Chatman-Roland Barthes analysis of James Joyce's "Eveline" (Chatman, "New Ways"; Sosnoski), and Jennie Skerl has also resorted to the same story to test Vladimir Propp's model for Russian fairy tales. Wallace Martin has provided a convenient bibliography of such studies on a number of nineteenth- and twentieth-century writers of narrative (189-90n5). Since 1990 *Style's* annual bibliographical issue (number 4) has published William Baker and Kenneth Womack's annotated listings of literary theory and criticism as well as specialized studies by David Gorman on Russian Formalism (26.4), Bakhtin and his circle (27.4; 28.4; 30.4), Jonathan Culler (29.4), and Gerard Genette (30.4). The theories of the French semiotician A. J. Greimas have most frequently served critics of nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature: Henri Mitterand on the nineteenth-century French novel (203-12), Susan Suleiman on the bildungsroman and the thesis novel (65; 273n39; 279n25), Lodge on Hemingway (32), John N. Duvall on Faulkner, and perhaps most persistently Fredric Jameson on Balzac, Gissing, and Conrad. Jameson's interpretation of the latter's *Lord Jim* and *Nostromo* by means of Greimas's semiotic square is exemplary (277). Despite this tendency to concentrate on writers of the last two centuries, some semioticians have devoted their attentions to ancient and medieval writers, including Ovid, Petronius, Boccaccio, and Chaucer (Martin and Conrad; Allen),(1) and a few have applied Greimas to medieval narrative, notably the Arthurian corpus (Maddox; Collins).

Not all of this practical criticism is successful, however, and the failure may not, at least in some cases, be ascribed to the critics. Not many theoreticians have hastened to adopt the Greimasian method, which, in the words of Robert Scholes, may be "more interesting than satisfying" (*Structuralism* 107) because it is incomplete and confusing (103, 106). In his second book on structuralism, *Semiotics and Interpretation*, Scholes avoids Greimas although he attempts to apply Tzvetan Todorov, Genette, and Roland Barthes's codes again to Joyce's "Eveline" (89-104). And in his later, pedagogical book, *Textual Power*, the structuralist model is veiled, appearing, for instance, in the method of examining oppositions in the manner of Levi-Strauss (32). This suggests that Greimas's semiotic square, based on contraries and contradictions, is simply redundant since most narratives proceed on these bases (Segre 51). Generally, though, the opposition to Greimas and to Claude Bremond, another French semiotician, has complained of their mistaken claim to create a system valid for all narrative when the model has actually been derived inductively from a limited corpus of fairy tales (Kloepfer 117n1) or cultural clichés (Ricoeur 264), or opponents have criticized these systems' reductiveness, inapplicable abstraction (Culler 232, 235; Segre 27, 34; Riffaterre 31), or their failure to take into account the temporal aspect of plot (Brooks xiii).

In the analysis that follows, I shall try to reply to these criticisms (though occasionally acknowledging their justification) by demonstrating how Greimas and especially Bremond might successfully be applied to a narrative. What we shall discover, I believe, is that Bremond's system does account for the forward movement of action, though perhaps not in the way Peter Brooks envisages it - psychologically - and although both Greimas's and Bremond's taxonomies abstract character and action, these very abstractions may reveal similarities and differences not immediately apparent at the so-called surface level of plot. Finally, the charge that these taxonomies may not be purely logical constructs may be happily admitted, for a narrative model based on cultural givens would seem to have a better chance of accounting for individual stories that reflect these clichés, provided that the generalities chosen (the "isotopies" in Greimas's terms) are general enough to be valid in most Western cultures. This dependence of the isotopy, which generates the semiotic square, on the culture, the intertext, would seem to be freely admitted by Greimasians (Adam 100, 105). On the

other hand, it is true that particularly in complex narratives not all readers will agree on the label applied to the isotopy (Rimmon-Kenan 14), but in simpler narratives or in narratives where the isotopy is explicitly mentioned or clearly implied (Adam 97, 100; Courtes 50-51; Greimas, *Du sens* 188), usually agreement will easily be reached.

As for critical agreements and disagreements, commentators who have extended the valuable work on sources and analogues for the *Canterbury Tales* to a consideration of the genre of the *Miller's Tale* have either been alarmed by the bawdy nature of the fabliau and criticized Chaucer for using it, or have used this conventional genre as an explanation or even an excuse on the basis of decorum for Chaucer's scandalous language and action. (Sir Walter Scott's entry on chivalry in the 1818 edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* is representative.) Others argue on behalf of Chaucer's skillful use of the genre in implying a moral, if not explicitly pointing to one, by creating allegorical figures in Nicholas, John, and Absolon who stand respectively for "carnality, temporality, flattery" (Bolton 91); or by dramatizing an ordered universe based on the natural attraction of youth, the danger of an unequal marriage, and the dominance of instinct over reason (Ruggiers 64, 65, 56); or contrarily, by implying a disordered universe of injustice, typical of the realistic fabliau (Brewer 262). More relevant to the present study are basic critical agreements on character: John is rather ridiculous because of the discrepancy of his age with Alison's (Boothman 9) or because of his pretensions to wealth (Bennett 29ff); Nicholas is exonerated because of his antecedents in the cleric amant, who always goes free in the fabliau (Nykrog 132); and Absolon is satirized for his exaggerated courtly wooing of Alison (Olson 232). The greatest crux of critical disagreement comes in regard to Alison, who, according to some, is not morally judged by the tale: she is just a healthy natural woman (Miller 157; Rudat labels Alison as a "Mother Nature figure," whose power in the Tale derives from her association with the "phallicism of the pear tree" in fertility ritual [139]). But according to others, she is condemned by having the tale attached to her (Robinson 97). Finally a third group finds that the tale pardons her (Norton-Smith 139). It is to this unresolved debate that the present study intends to contribute while connecting this thematic question of poetic justice to another involving deception (mentioned briefly by Bolton [93] as a "web" or "pattern" "of deceptions") and to the question of structure, one form of which - the triangle plots - has been noticed (Jordan 189, 191-93).

One exercise that might be worth performing, as we apply the models of Greimas and Bremond to the *Miller's Tale*, is to begin by investigating what may be called the "surface level" of the narrative or at least a portion of it, as Vladimir Propp did in his work on the Russian fairy tale. Since we have a taxonomy provided and are less interested in testing it than using it for interpretive purposes, we need not examine a body of fabliaux to derive general rules about this genre, but may proceed directly from the study of relevant surface details in Chaucer's tale to ordering them according to what the general models predict. We would anticipate, then, that the details thus arranged according to the heuristic paradigm would reveal deep-structure patterns perhaps suggesting some governing themes, or isotopies, a process these models have not always proven successful in stimulating.

As Terence Hawkes points out, structuralists have often built their systems on the basis of binary opposition (93), which seems to be a fundamental human thought process. Not surprisingly, binary oppositions are not difficult to find in literary works, and the *Miller's Tale* is certainly no exception (see Turner 291-92 for a brief application of Levi-Strauss's binary oppositions to the *Miller's Tale*). A handy cover term for some oppositions there might be "work" with its synonyms and other derivatives. Assigning labels to character traits and actions on the basis of this isotopy and its opposites yields an awareness of both the comic irony and interpretive clues about the value system of the fictional world and about the assigning of characters to Greimasian roles and to places on the semiotic square. Work is, of course, most often associated with the carpenter John, who even when he leaves town does so apparently for business reasons - to buy timber, for instance (3667) - as opposed to Absolon, who goes to Oseneye rather for pleasure (3659-60).(2) We would assume also that John, a carpenter, works at his trade while in his hometown: work would be attached to him regardless of the locale. He proposes himself to Nicholas as a model of the working man (3491). Significantly, the other major characters, whether at Oseneye or at Oxford, are for the most part occupied with pleasure, and ironically on both occasions that John supposedly goes on business to Oseneye, Nicholas and Alison plot their pleasures. A further irony occurs, whether intended or not by the speaker, when Nicholas, in making arrangements for the night of play with Alison, advises John to follow Nicholas's advice in language particularly suitable for John's understanding: Nicholas uses the word "werken" thrice in the space of five lines (3527-31). Of course, Nicholas's work as a student seems to be neglected in favor of making music, and his avocation as an astrologer is directed ultimately to the

service of pleasure. Likewise, Absolon perverts the meaning of "sweat," customarily linked with work, in a parodied imitation of the frustrated romantic lover in his appeal for Alison's favors (3702-03). In fact, it is rather difficult to determine which of the two suitors is potentially the more worthy lover if the criteria are good looks and the ability to play musical instruments. Actually, Absolon would seem to be the more qualified.

Such talents suggest that another set of oppositions could be generated by the isotopy of knowledge. In addition to the knowledge of grooming, dressing, and playing music, both Nicholas and Absolon know the ways of wooing, and though the former is more successful, the latter employs a greater variety of methods, including talk, serenades, and gifts. Absolon is also skilled in the various duties associated with the barber's trade, in minor legal acts, and in dancing. Opposed to the knowledgeable is John the "gnof," who, though rich, is something of a miserly churl, even proud of his ignorance (3455). Linked with this is his religious superstition, his gullibility, which leaves him open to Nicholas's deception by means of the pseudoreligious prediction of the second Flood, preparations for which send John to his "wery bisynesse" that puts him into a "dede sleep" (3643), a state contrary to that of Nicholas and Alison at the same time.

When such binary oppositions are connected with their governing isotopies and with the outcome of the tale's action, it becomes evident that certain values prevail in this fictional world over their contraries: certain types of pleasure over work and certain forms of knowledge over ignorance. Such values and other related ones will figure in our assigning characters to roles and positions in three of Greimas's models. Despite the frequent structuralist claims for taxonomies developed deductively, the inductive method associated with Levi-Strauss's anthropological field work and Greimas's studies in semantics would also seem to be a possible process in the application of Greimas's theory. According to Courtes, one can begin more or less deductively with the abstract isotopies that govern the semiotic square and then fill in the names of characters; or, more inductively, starting with the surface level, assign the names of characters to the positions on the square according to their oppositions and then derive the abstract isotopies from this (Courtes 197, citing Greimas, *Du sens* 187 and "les actants" 162). Obviously Greimas's practical criticism, if it can be called that, in such as his study of Maupassant's "Deux amis" (Maupassant), begins with a reading of the text to be analyzed, but the following analysis is far from innocent because it is already shaped by one or more of the models. After this first step of identifying oppositions and isotopies, a second step might be to classify the type of plot: whether, for instance, it is a contractual one or a performative (conjunctive or disjunctive) one or both. Obviously both types shape the Miller's Tale, with the contracts between Nicholas and Alison for their night of love-making, between Nicholas and John for salvation from the flood, and the attempted one between Absolon and Alison for a kiss. These contribute to the performative plots of disjunction between John and Alison and conjunction between Nicholas and Alison. In Greimas's scheme such a plot of struggle and exchange of an object could be diagrammed as in Figure 1, where we see that in the first state John possesses Alison, and Nicholas does not; that as a result of Nicholas's persuading Alison not to remain exclusively with John, Nicholas possesses Alison, who in all cases is the so-called object of value (Greimas, "Acquis" 11-15). A similar diagram of Absolon's attempt to seduce Alison shows his failure to transform the situation: the object is not exchanged. (However, as we shall see, with Alison's disappearance at a crucial moment, it would appear that at least temporarily none of the three men possesses her any more.)

Two remarks about method might be made at this point. The first is that, as has been noticed often, structural narratologists tend to choose relatively uncomplex stories to analyze: the fairy tale; the detective story; or in the case of Greimas, relatively simple short tales.⁽³⁾ These narratives are amenable to systems that reduce them to their bare terms, and our choice and handling of the Miller's Tale fits this tradition so far. In fact, our reduction in Figure 1 could easily lead us to constitute the main plot of the tale as a "kernel narrative" in Gerald Prince's terms (Narratology 83; Grammar 31), consisting of at least two events and one modification of a state arranged in chronological order: Alison was beautiful and faithful to John, and then Nicholas wooed Alison, and then, as a result, Alison was no longer faithful to John. One can easily conclude that the method merely makes a simple story simpler. On the other hand, these reductions of the narrative to its structural bones do suggest a line of inquiry worth pursuing. In Greimas's model, Alison appears to be only an object of value, possessed or not possessed by two different men. Similarly, in Prince's scheme Alison seems to be relatively inactive in the first two statements: she has two given traits, beauty and faithfulness, the latter resulting only from her

acceptance of a marriage proposal from another and her observance of the resulting legal and moral state codified by her society. In the second statement it is Nicholas who acts. Although the third statement describes Alison's new state of infidelity in negative terms and in terms that emphasize her dependency on John, a contradiction of her former state, it does imply a more willful act on her part in defying what the law and presumably the culture support: that is, fidelity in marriage.

Such an attempt to define Alison as more than a lack, more than just an object of value, however, seems to be defeated by both the Greimas model presented in Figure 1 and the second Greimas taxonomy diagrammed in Figure 2. Just as in the plots-of-struggle diagrams, where all three men appear as possessors or potential possessors of the object Alison, so in the diagram of roles, men assume the functions of different actants (Greimas, *Semantique structurale* 20-21; Courtes 54; Hawkes 88-90; Blanche 56) while Alison assumes only the role of object. Nicholas is both subject (protagonist, principal mover) and receiver of the desired object. John is his first opponent to be outwitted, whereas Absolon is a second, rather helpless opponent to be degraded. In a sense John is also the sender, unwittingly of course, because his age and absence from home from a young, attractive wife push her (though she does not need much encouragement) into the arms of a more willing (and undoubtedly able) man. Another version of this paradigm accounting for Absolon's attempted seduction of Alison shows Absolon as subject and as potential receiver and John and Nicholas (hidden to Absolon) as opponents with John again as sender and Nicholas as the actual receiver of the object only because, we are told, Alison loves him better despite all of Absolon's efforts (3385-88). Greimas's systems seem to reveal a great deal of energy in the men's (especially Nicholas's and Absolon's) activities as opposed to an almost motiveless acceptance or rejection by Alison.

Finally, Figure 3 contains diagrams of three semiotic squares, each governed by a different term for an isotopy that stands in what Courtes calls hyponymique relation to the two contraries it produces. In principle, each isotopy also generates its contradictory term, placed at the bottom of each square, which generates the two contradictories occupying the two positions beneath and implied by the upper contraries (54). However, in the third semiotic square in Figure 3, it is difficult to understand how "nonretribution" generates "injustice" and in the second semiotic square how "nondissimulation" is the contrary of "nonhypocrisy" and in the first semiotic square how "nonseduction" generates "sex." In spite of such increased complexity and the resulting difficulties of this model, it nevertheless does yield some additional insights about the tale, but at the cost of inconsistency at times. Furthermore, it seems to lead to the same conclusions that we have drawn from the two other taxonomies. Although Alison does occupy two different positions on the three squares, as do both Nicholas and John, while Absolon occupies three, all of the men are placed at least twice at the upper "positive" poles of the contraries, whereas Alison's placement is always below at one or the other of the "negative" contradictory poles.

Although one might object to the occasional inconsistencies and to the simplification and consequent insensitivity to subtleties that Greimas's categorizations inevitably lead to, one might also argue that such a system's abstracting can actually imply and thus reveal variations and depths that the system and the narrative seem to conceal. For instance, although John is in the superior "positive" position in squares I and III, his allegiance to matrimony is not necessarily commendable in the fictional world of this tale because he seems not to be really committed to his wife. True, he is concerned about rescuing her from the flood, but he remains relatively unmoved by Absolon's serenade to Alison, an incongruity that does not escape the narrator (3364-70). His association with justice in square III can mean only that he deserves retribution because of the underhanded plots against his bourgeois peace, but his pleas for understanding (of course, he does not even know about the plots attempted and practiced against the sanctity of his marriage) at the end of the story only meet with derision: the carpenter is not only thought ignorant but is considered mad by the townspeople and hardly a candidate for some sort of justice. In square II John's nonhypocritical label, though normally a positive sign, is not such in a world where dissimulation brings its rewards. Thus, he is placed in the inferior "negative" position; lack of hypocrisy simply reinforces John's stupidity.

If such interpretations of John are suggested by a comparison of the abstracted models with the much more complex texture of the tale, the same might be discovered in regard to Alison. Her assignment to the nonmatrimony slot does not mean so much that she outrightly contradicts or defies her husband in the guise of a modern liberated woman or as a variation of the Wife of Bath or that she dislikes marriage; rather it may mean that she is willing to interpret the institution of marriage liberally, to share love and sex, as

indeed the Miller advises husbands to grant to their wives (3158-66). Likewise, in square II, one might ask how Alison can be associated with nondissimulation when she deceives her husband and tricks Absolon. But the circumstances under which John leaves her alone with Nicholas and her candid reply about hearing very well Absolon's serenade, if they do not excuse her completely, certainly disarm accusation. And in square III, although Alison's offering her behind (or a nearby part of her body) in lieu of her lips for Absolon to kiss cannot be classed as so grievous a wound as that inflicted by the revengeful Absolon, her degrading act could be motivated as a vengeful punishment for all the bother Absolon has caused her. Still, in spite of her warning on this occasion to leave her alone, she apparently has accepted Absolon's gifts and blandishments without objection and thus has little reason to avenge herself. Her "Tehee" after the kiss and her desire to make a fool of Absolon would seem to classify her actions as a mild sort of revenge at the most. The negative label of nonrevenge, like those of nondissimulation and nonmatrimony attached to Alison only suggest, as we reflect more about her situation, a more subtly ambiguous position than the semiotic square at first indicates. So too, after reflection, one might better understand how in square II Allison's "nondissimulation" (in the sense of a knowing innocence) is indeed the contrary of John's nonhypocrisy (in the sense of stupidity).

Of course, some of the problems with abstracting models are their lack of fit between the one concept and the variety of particular cases subsumed by it as well as the predetermination by the isotopic term and its generated contraries of the contradictories. The analyst is caught between choosing terms that correspond to the logic of the square and possibly different terms that describe more accurately the situation in the story. A certain amount of arbitrariness or compromise often enters into the choice of terms. Perhaps for these reasons, Bremond would eliminate what he believes to be the unnecessary contrary terms (Logique 93; for an English translation of an earlier version of Bremond's system, see "Logic"). Furthermore, Bremond criticizes Greimas's scheme for its inadaptability to the analysis of a variety of different types of narrative and for its spatializing of the narrative (89-90). Indeed, the dynamic dimension of Bremond's system allows it to account for the time element in narrative while at the same time permitting it to show "spatial" relations of characters and actions that can be taken in almost simultaneously by the reader's eye. (In Figure 41 have chosen to spatialize more than Bremond would no doubt authorize for the convenience of including the whole diagram on facing pages.)

This modification of Bremond's system, based, as is evident, on a three-step process, reveals, I believe, more about the tale than a more linear diagram. (For completeness, I have included a full list of Bremond's roles although I do not refer to all of them.) What I have attempted is no doubt a compromise necessitated by the desire to spatialize, at least in part, the time-governed processes of reading and narrative action. Movement on the figure is indicated partially by arrows and is implied according to the conventions of reading from top to bottom and from left to right, though these conventions cannot always be observed on such a figure. What will appear immediately, as a result of this attempt to combine sequence and simultaneity on the same diagram, are a double vertical division first into a Course of Love and Dissimulation (itself divided horizontally twice into the Courses of Seduction and of Frustrated Seduction with two different interest points of view⁽⁴⁾ - those of Nicholas and Absolon - and a third point of view - Alison's - divided between listening to Nicholas and listening to Absolon). More developed than the first part because it represents the complication and resolution of the action prepared in the first part, the second part - Courses of Love, Dissimulation, Degradation, and Retribution (this last term indicating an added motivation) - is also divided into two general subparts: Courses of Love, Dissimulation, and Degradation, involving first Nicholas and Alison's point of view together and subsequently John's point of view; and Courses of Dissimulation, Degradation, and Retribution, involving first Nicholas and Alison's point of view together and then Absolon's point of view.

From the beginning these points of view are associated with roles, also more or less arranged symmetrically. Nicholas is a seducer; his counterpart, Absolon, is a potential seducer. Alison is a seducee, or, preferably, in Bremond's terms a beneficiary of Nicholas's seduction and a potential victim from her point of view of Absolon's attempted seduction. In the second part, Nicholas and Alison join forces as mutual seducers, so to speak, since Alison is now as willing as Nicholas to engage in lovemaking, and as dissimulators (Alison cooperates in the deception) to maneuver John, a victim, out of the way. In the other horizontal half of the second part, Alison and Nicholas again join (but now it is Alison who invents the deception) to victimize Absolon. After Absolon administers the first kiss,

the plot is developed further at this point by his aborted second kiss, for which is substituted Nicholas's fart, to which Absolon's reply is the "kiss" of the red-hot coulter.⁽⁵⁾ The symmetry is again perfect with two occurrences doubled: a kiss, an aborted kiss, a fart, and a branding. In the process the first victim, Absolon, becomes the retributor, and the first dissimulator, Nicholas, becomes a victim in a double switching of roles from patient (he follows Alison) to agent (he farts) and from agent to patient (he is branded). Nicholas's reaction to the fire is a call for water, a symmetrical cry balancing his passing of air; it causes John to fall to earth, completing the evocation of the four medieval elements.

In addition to the symmetries of character and action, which become more evident from the diagramming of the plot, are two important thematic implications. Of the four isotopies that govern both major parts of the plot Love, Dissimulation, Degradation, and Retribution - Dissimulation appears either explicitly or implicitly most often. The concept is assumed in the act of seduction in the first part of the plot, and it is also implied there as deception of the husband by the other parties. The Course of Dissimulation is more obvious to the reader in the second part, where Nicholas and Alison hide from John to make love and where they contrive to make him believe in the coming flood. Dissimulation is also evident in Nicholas's at first hiding from Absolon and then presenting an unexpected part of the body, not to speak of an unexpected emanation of the body, a body supposedly belonging to Alison. Dissimulation is, of course, evident in Alison's substitution of one part of her body for another and in Absolon's substitution of a red-hot iron for his red-hot lips. And the dissimulation continues in the story's denouement, beyond the scope of this figure, as Nicholas and Alison lie about John's fantasy: his monomania about a flood. Despite John's protestations - we would assume that they express a true account of what happened from his point of view - he is only ridiculed: the only frank character is the ultimate victim. The Miller's Tale seems to overvalue deception.

A second thematic implication resulting from a study of this application of Bremond's model is the overvaluing of Alison, whose absence of punishment in the end has given commentators some concern. Indeed, the symmetry we have spoken of is interrupted at the climactic moment of the action: Alison disappears as her two lovers confront each other in a sort of blindfolded duel and as her husband so suddenly reappears (one is tempted to call his coincidental dropping in a parody of the melodramatic rescue). While the text has been devoting itself to Nicholas and Absolon and then to John, it has neglected Alison, the fourth character, who suddenly becomes just as conspicuous by her absence as John by his miraculous presence. When the text remembers her, and this it does immediately after John's intrusion - an unwanted third party spoiling the symmetry of the two lovers - it couples her with Nicholas (3824), effectually hiding her individuality, and thus creates a new symmetry opposing them to John (and Absolon). But Absolon's name is not mentioned, as if he now has disappeared, and the asymmetry of three characters opposes the new couple, Nicholas and Alison, to John, who remains alone as the victim of ridicule. Where Alison had disappeared at the moment of poetic justice, making an awkward asymmetry that reveals three punished men - Absolon at least implicitly wiping his mouth, Nicholas cooling his behind, and John nursing his broken arm - she reappears in symmetrical company with her lover to help divert the punishment by the principle of poetic justice toward John, who without a partner stands outside the protection of even numbers.

When we look back up at the top of the diagram, we realize how it reveals Alison's process of learning about dissimulation and of changing from a passive potential victim to an active dissimulator and degrader.⁽⁶⁾ She has been quickly initiated into the overdetermined value of this fictional world. In the first half, she goes to school to Nicholas and learns the lesson of seduction so that she is capable of handling Absolon. Having understood sexual deception, she next learns the confidence trick from Nicholas's practicing it on John. Then she puts her knowledge into practice by degrading Absolon. This act actually modifies her role from pupil to teacher of Nicholas, who is not only demoted to an inferior role in the schooling process but is also punished for what Henri Bergson would call comic repetition ("raideur de mecanique" 8): in merely imitating Alison's gesture of offering her nether part as target, he is given a hot spanking for his failure of imagination (Rudat adds "phallic pride" to the reasons for Nicholas's punishment [140]). I would even propose here that the symmetry in Figure 4 - which divides roughly into equal halves the diagram of the two lower Courses of Love, Dissimulation, and Degradation and of Dissimulation, Degradation, and Retribution - suggests the approximately equal duration of Nicholas and Alison's patient waiting for the opportune moment to plan and effect their night of love compared to the time of Absolon's impatient and unwelcome wooing of Alison. Absolon is punished by the misdirected kiss for

participating naively in Alison's and the text's travesty of romance (thus, his many courtly-love traits), whereas Nicholas is rewarded for his encouraged patience, perhaps also a stimulation toward the gratification by love. Punishment for impatient persistence is then repeated, though applied to Nicholas's rear (as opposed to Absolon's lips), when Nicholas rather unimaginatively attempts to duplicate Alison's degrading trick. His inventiveness (the fart), which varies the mere repetition of Alison's retribution, is, however, inferior to Absolon's more forceful retribution. In fact, at this point the narrative almost threatens to modify its comic mode.

I would suggest, in conclusion, that Bremond's system, in permitting one to spatialize a plot (as Greimas's scheme almost exclusively does) but with greater allowance for a variety of roles than Greimas's system provides, may reveal the plot's symmetries and at the same time the exceptions, often significant, to these symmetries. Furthermore, with its dynamic factor accommodating the temporal progression of the action, Bremond's model may reveal important changes in character, made evident by a glance that compares a character's situation at the end of the narrative with what it was (is) on the diagram at the beginning. The result of such an application of a theoretical model to a particular narrative may be to provide insights not only into the absences, say, of a character, marked in this case by the exceptional asymmetry as determined by a comparison to the ruling symmetry, but also to reveal implied ruling isotopies, which otherwise may have remained hidden from the interpreter.

Notes

1 In 1981 Morton Bloomfield foresaw "advances in Chaucerian studies" especially from structuralists and narratologists of the Proppian school (32). Coincidentally in the same year, Britton J. Harwood applied Claude Levi-Strauss's theories of binary oppositions and of codes to the Miller's Tale, and in 1989 Peggy A. Knapp examined the Miller's dialogic style in the light of Mikhail M. Bakhtin. A year earlier, Martin B. Shichtman had analyzed the dialogic nature of the Knight and the Miller's exchanges (403-07).

2 All quotes from Chaucer are taken from F. N. Robinson's edition.

3 Romain Gaudreault has recently suggested some promising changes and additions to Greimas's model. Judging from the complexities resulting from the application of the model to "Puss 'n' Boots," I decided not to pursue Gaudreault's lead in my study of Chaucer's more complicated tale. Furthermore, Gaudreault does not consider Bremond, whose system, which includes a greater variety of roles and processes, offers in its way solutions to some of the omissions and weaknesses that Gaudreault notes in Greimas's model.

4 I use the term "interest point of view" here basically in Seymour Chatman's sense of implying the interest of a character, not necessarily his or her visual, emotional, or conceptual focus (Story 152).

5 Notice that Bremond's system accounts more specifically for Absolon's situation than does Greimas's. In the latter's structure of roles [ILLUSTRATION FOR FIGURE 2 OMITTED], Absolon is classed, like Nicholas, as a receiver, but he does not receive the object of value, Alison, or at least not the object he expected. Likewise in the first semiotic square of Figure 3, Absolon's sharing the potential for an illegal relationship and youth with Nicholas and Alison does not enable him to attain his object. In fact, these qualities are synonymous rather than contrary and contradictory to the identical qualities assigned to Nicholas and Alison on the diagram. The only contrary and contradictory quality that is attributed to Absolon here is nonsex, a contrary of Alison's sexual success and a contradictory of Nicholas's.

6 From a feminist perspective, Karma Lochrie argues, on the contrary, that in a system of different isotopies governed by the masculine economy of cuckoldry and "paying back," Alison is reduced to "secret to thing to prank" and ultimately to nothing by her disappearance (301). Such an analysis does not take into account Alison's increasing power and knowledge that my reading proposes or Alison's success in defeating Absolon's attempt to impose on her body the gloss of courtly-love language, as Kara Virginia Donaldson's feminist reading argues (149-50).

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